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251217Z May 05

UNCLAS ABU DHABI 002365

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STATE FOR G, G/TIP, INL, DRL, NEA/RA, AND NEA/ARPI
STATE ALSO PASS TO USTR

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [ELAB](#) [TC](#)

SUBJECT: UAE HOLDS CAMEL RACE WITHOUT BOY JOCKEYS

REF: A. ABU DHABI 2143

[1](#)B. ABU DHABI 1167

[1](#)1. (SBU) On May 19, Emirates TV station carried a live broadcast of a camel race featuring jockeys whose age and weight appeared to conform with camel racing guidelines adopted by the UAE Government in mid-March (ref B). Embassy officers who watched the race on television noted that the jockeys appeared to be of a size consistent with the age and weight guidelines. The race at the Al Wathba camel racetrack on the outskirts of Abu Dhabi was sponsored by Abu Dhabi ruling family member, Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, who is Minister of Presidential Affairs. The race was not announced in the media, and Emirates TV was apparently the only media organization that covered the event. As with other competitive camel races, there were cash prizes for winning camel owners.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The purpose of this race was to demonstrate that the UAE could hold a camel race that conformed with the new regulations established in mid-March by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan, a Ministry of Interior spokesman told PolChief on May 24. Sheikh Hamdan, who is also the president of the country's Camel Racing Federation, had announced March 13 a law banning jockeys under age 16 and not weighing at least 45 kilograms from participating in camel races. (Note: The official camel racing season in Abu Dhabi ended on March 31, and the new season will resume next fall.)

[1](#)3. (SBU) June Kunugi, UNICEF Oman Representative and Acting Representative for UNICEF's Gulf Area Office, said she learned from the Ministry of Interior that the race was a one-time event intended to demonstrate that the UAE could hold a race that respected the new law. She said the Ministry of Interior told her that police were on hand to ensure that underage or underweight boys did not participate. "They made a show of holding children who appeared to be younger than 16 years of age," Kunugi said. The Ministry of Interior contact noted that the May 19 races were slower because the camels were carrying heavier jockeys, but that over time the UAE would introduce lighter-weight titanium saddles to speed up the races.

[1](#)4. (SBU) UNICEF and the Ministry of Interior signed a project agreement May 8 for the care and repatriation of an estimated 3,000 boys (ref A). Kunugi said that UNICEF's action plan probably will not be completed until early to mid-June. The action plan will include details of how UNICEF plans to "map" the thousands of boys who have been working on camel farms across the country so that UNICEF can then plan for their identification and protection within the UAE, as well as their eventual rehabilitation, repatriation, and reintegration into the boys' countries of origin.

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